

Retellings of the *Faerie Queene*

Velma Bourgeois Richmond, 2016. *The Faerie Queene as Children's Literature. Victorian and Edwardian Retellings in Words and Pictures*. Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland and Company, Inc. 275 pp. ISBN 978-1-4766-2587-4

The Faerie Queene as Children's Literature. Victorian and Edwardian Retellings in Words and Pictures is one of many books written by Velma Bourgeois Richmond, Professor Emerita of English at Holy Names University in Oakland, California. In comparison to her previous works, such as *Chaucer as Children's Literature: Retellings from the Victorian and Edwardian Eras* (2004), *Shakespeare as Children's Literature: Edwardian Retellings in Words and Pictures* (2008) and *Chivalric Stories as Children's Literature* (2014), this study is much narrower in scope but serves as an extension of literary history. The book focuses on adaptations of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, a 16th-century English epic poem, created for children in Victorian and Edwardian England, as well as on American adaptations from the same period.

The book is divided into six chapters. The first chapter, "Contexts and Criticism", considers the world in which Spenser lived. The author offers explanations of the political, cultural, social and religious context of the era in which *The Faerie Queene* was created. Spenser wanted to transform classic Catholic medieval romance into something more suited to Protestantism, which was quite difficult due to the religious happenings in England at that time. Within this chapter, however, Richmond is not consistent when naming the time periods of Spenser, often switching between them.

The next two chapters – "Victorian Beginnings" and "Edwardian Extravagance" – offer examples of adaptations of *The Faerie Queene* for both adults and children. Richmond discusses the difficulty of making such adaptations since the original is too complex for adults to read, which makes it even more challenging to adapt for children. In "Victorian Beginnings" the author examines the poem as a Protestant statement and offers the titles of a few adaptations made in that period. However, she does not explain why those particular adaptations were chosen. In the third and longest chapter of the book, "Edwardian Extravagance", the author explores the immense number of adaptations of *The Faerie Queene* published in the fifteen years before World War I. Richmond focuses on the illustrations made for literary adaptations such as those of A.G. Walker for Mary Macleod's *Stories from the Faerie Queene* (1897) or the illustrations of Frank C. Papé.

In the fourth chapter, "American Difference", Richmond provides an overview of the adaptations of *The Faerie Queene* made in the US, where the poem was less favoured than in Britain. Americans read Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and Cervantes' *Don Quixote* instead, and were less familiar with Spenser's works. Even when Americans talked about *The Faerie Queene* it was in comparison to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, which was more accessible and therefore preferred reading. On the rare occasion *The Faerie Queene* found its way into a home library collection, it was perceived merely as a work representing medieval romance.

Richmond uses the rest of the book – chapters 5 ("Schoolbooks") and 6 ("Literary Histories") – to discuss how *The Faerie Queene* was introduced and promoted as a

canonical work in British schools. She briefly mentions how American schoolbooks tended to overlook Spenser's work. The epilogue mentions adaptations of *The Faerie Queene* made during the last fifty years. One of them, *The Questing Knights of the Faerie Queene* by Geraldine McCaughrean (2004), uses the characters of Britomart Britomart, a female knight, and Talus, a man of iron, to provide insight into gender. Richmond suggests that the latest adaptations of the poem give reason to believe that *The Faerie Queene* still remains a significant part of literary history.

In her well-researched book, Richmond provides an informative look into Victorian and Edwardian adaptations of *The Faerie Queene*. She contextualises Spenser's work and offers examples of adaptations made in both England and the United States. The book is well structured and provides the reader with all the necessary information in an accessible way. Especially interesting are the author's observations on the adaptations of *The Faerie Queene* made in the last 50 years. The first two chapters are the most informative as they introduce the social, religious, historical and political context in which Spenser wrote. As such, they will be useful for anyone who wants to find out more about chivalric romance.

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Child Rule and the Paradoxes of Children's Literature

Christopher Kelen & Björn Sundmark, eds. 2017. *Child Autonomy and Child Governance in Children's Literature: Where Children Rule*. New York: Routledge. 250 pp. ISBN 978-1-138-93164-0

In their elegant introduction to the recently published volume *Child Autonomy and Child Governance in Children's Literature: Where Children Rule*, editors Christopher Kelen and Björn Sundmark explain why the concept of child rule in children's literature is such a fruitful subject of study. The reason is far from simple and concerns the deeply paradoxical nature of children's literature much debated by scholars in the field for over thirty years. Kelen and Sundmark are not the first to note that although children rarely rule their own everyday lives, stories written for and about them frequently portray them as empowered and in charge. Yet, inspired by Paul Hazard's idea of "The Republic of Childhood" (1944), they have found a fresh way to approach the contradictory impulse at the heart of children's literature, which is to contain childhood while simultaneously escaping it. As they put it, childhood as metaphor and social construction is "a state of unbecoming: to be a child is to be in the process of no longer being a child" (8) and, thus, children's literature is infused by conflicting struggles to both liberate and control the child.

In addition to the introduction, the volume comprises fourteen essays more or less obviously connected to the theme of child rule. At best, this inclusive principle results in a plethora of voices and perspectives, including many delightful surprises for the reader. At worst, it leaves the reader slightly confused as to the guiding principle behind the volume as a whole. Clearly, the volume would have benefited from slightly stricter editing. For example, whereas the title states that children's literature is at the heart of the study, many of the essays explore a variety of materials, such as comic strips, TV series, film, and religious imagery. Moreover, essay authors who write about the same texts (e.g. Carroll's *Alice*